2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

sacrifice previously described; again, there is a big tree in the middle, this time adorned with a strip of white cloth, which is renewed at each ceremonial; if the village has a 'born' *Ndazo*, he will wear the new cloth round his waist while officiating, and put it back on the tree afterwards. Also tied to the tree are two tortoise shells, which will serve as drinking vessels during the sacrifice and afterwards as musical instruments, being beaten with small sticks. The other musical instruments used in the *gunnu* are as unusual and are employed on no other occasion; they consist in two large and two small pot drums (of Gwari manufacture), and a raft-zither made of reed. During the year they are stored in the house of the *Žigi*, who has, however, no other function in the *gunnu*.

On the day of the *gunnu*, before dawn, the *gunnu* drums begin to play. This is the signal for the boys and young men to leave their homes and to go to some secret place in the bush, led by the *Ndazo* and the *Ndakotsu* (the appointed leader of their age grades). Arrived in the bush, where they may only talk in whispers, they remove their caps and everyday clothes and dress in *gunnu* fashion, that is, in a loincloth of striped cloth such as the women wear round the waist. They break off twigs of the *nūbeci* tree, which will later serve as the 'whips of the *gunnu*'.[1] Then the novices are taught the deportment required of them at the ceremonial—to keep their heads bent, eyes on the ground, as one does in the presence of superiors; equally they are taught the *gunnu* salute, which consists in a fierce yell, accompanied by the throwing-up of both arms and a rhythmical stamping on the ground. During these proceedings the novices at least are visibly frightened, while the older boys try to show their unconcern. Finally, they leave the bush, walking in single file, the tallest first, to the place of the sacrifice; throughout the ceremonial the young men will move thus, in a long file, 'whips' in hand, led or sometimes driven by the priest and the *Ndakotsu*.

At the *gunnu* place they join the older men who have meanwhile assembled. The musicians sit under the tree and have started drumming and singing. Everyone is stripped to the waist and sits on leaves or branches, since it is sacrilege to sit on the bare ground of the *gunnu 'ba*. The older men form a circle round the place of the sacrifice; the youths sit some distance apart, though they will from time to time jump up to 'salute' late-comers or to drive away strangers who might trespass on the secret site. Soon the sacrifice follows, which varies from year to year, according to the advice of

[1] This tree has no further ceremonial significance, though its twigs are sometimes stuck into the ground outside a house as a charm against thieves.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

the diviner; in the ritual I observed it consisted of fish-and-porridge and the ubiquitous libation of beer. The *Ndazo*, on his knees and using one of the tortoise shells for a vessel, pours some beer on the ground, speaking thus:

'Lord God, take this. The *Etsu Daži* (chief) ordered us to make *gunnu*. *Gunnu*, may the town have health. The food of the soil, may it thrive greatly. The women, God give them children. May the town have health. Rain may fall, yam may thrive, corn may thrive. God may cause that everything shall prosper.'

Then the priest drinks, and more beer is handed round in gourds, first to the old men in order of age and rank, then to the musicians, and lastly to the young men. The sacrifice and invocation are repeated, now with a dish of food. Throughout the proceedings the *Ndazo's* younger brother acts as his assistant. At the end of the meal everyone washes his hands, in the same order of seniority, and the gourds which served as dishes are broken in pieces and left on the ground.

The sacrifice over, dancing begins, still in the secrecy of the *gunnu 'ba*. The older men dance singly, the young men in a group, the novices being taught and shown the dance steps by others who are more experienced. But while the older men can pause whenever they are tired, the youths must dance without a break, and are driven on to greater and greater exertions by their leaders. The excitement is visibly mounting, and may indeed go too far, for the young dancers will suddenly start using their 'whips' on one another. Though flogging with the whips of the *gunnu* has its place in the ritual, its premature introduction, at the place of the sacrifice, is a serious breach of discipline, and the culprits are made to kneel before the *Ndazo* and beg forgiveness. The incident is taken as a sign that the dance had lasted too long already (it had lasted about three hours); silence is ordered once again, the dance stops, and the congregation moves in a long procession to the village.

The secret part of the *gunnu* is now over; what follows is done publicly and before a crowd of onlookers. The youths race each other to the village, half running half dancing. They will beat anyone standing in their way, and this liberal use of the whips continues when they all arrive at the village. They lash out at each other and at strangers or women, although both strangers and most women are allowed to watch this stage of the ceremonial. This episode does not last long, however, and gives way to a general dance begun by the *Ndazo* in slow, dignified fashion. He is followed by other old men and the chief himself, who only now joins in the proceedings. Eventually everybody joins in, congregation and onlookers, men as well as women, and all join also in the singing.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

The dance frequently rises to feverish excitement, when the youths will suddenly resume using their whips, violently and against anyone. The flogging now has a purpose: when directed against male adolescents it is thought to promote growth and maturity; when directed against women, fertility. But there are also phases of calm as well as humorous episodes, acclaimed by general laughter. One episode, in particular, may be mentioned: now and again, the young men will imitate, with comic exaggeration, a typical women's dance or caricature the walk and gestures of women.

I will not describe the dance further: it fills the rest of the *gunnu* festivities, being interrupted only for a brief night's rest, and ends when all the beer is exhausted and everyone too tired to carry on. I will only note these important and partly unique features. Some time during the dance the young men form themselves into a procession led by the *Ndazo* and march and dance through the village, still singing the *gunnu* songs, to give the 'salute' in front of the houses of high-ranking elders. On the way they also visit the childless women of the village; for these are strictly forbidden to watch the *gunnu* dance and must hide in their huts until the ceremonial is over. These women may be unhappily barren; or they may be suspected of avoiding childbearing and family duties so that they might lead the immoral life of female traders and prostitutes (which, in Nupe, means one and the same thing). In either case the *Ndazo* will enter their house and encourage or admonish them, as the case may be; the woman, kneeling before him, will receive two lashes with the *gunnu* whip, administered by one of the young men, which is both a punishment and a promise of fertility. Women who have no taste for either will have to leave the village or hide in some other house during the critical period, as indeed quite a few are doing.

Again, few other Nupe rituals include a mixed dance of the sexes; in the *gunnu*, this is not only permitted but considered a relevant part of the celebration, as is the whole excited and abandoned tone of the dance. Always, when describing the *gunnu*, the Nupe will use some such phrase—'we make merry, we drink, we dance, men and women together without order, until we talk without sense'. This excitement is in no small measure sexual; not only is the attention of the young men constantly drawn to the other sex (even by the fact that they wear an item of women's dress), but the week preceding the *gunnu* and the whole period of the celebration are also marked by a severe prohibition of all sexual intercourse, lest death visit the community. Only when the dance is ended and everyone has bathed, the men in a nearby stream, the women at home, is the rule of chastity lifted; the same night men and women will again sleep together, matrimonially or promiscuously – no one cares.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

miscuously—no one cares. Which final aspect of the *gunnu* is once more emphasized in all statements.

The ceremonial is thus full of allusions to procreation and fertility. But we noticed also the emphasis on male adolescence, more precisely, on the role of the age grades, on the respect relationship between youth and old age, and on the teaching or initiation of the novices. In the ritual I described this last aspect was only lightly touched upon. But in a fuller version of the *gunnu*, which disappeared in Doko some ten or twenty years ago, the emphasis on initiation was much stronger. The short prelude in the bush was then expanded to a full night; and the youths were made to dress up in elaborate fashion and to paint their bodies red and white, so that everybody should see that they were '*gunnu* men'. All through the night the novices were kept in a state of nervous excitement and fear by tales of the spirits that haunt the bush; often the dreaded apparition of the *ndakó gboyá* would materialize to punish any youth who had, in the preceding year, offended against this or that rule of custom, and especially against the rules of filial respect. We shall hear more of the *ndakó gboyá* later on; let me say here that its part is acted by a member of the secret society of that name, and that it is also referred to as the 'policeman of the *gunnu*', which epithet aptly summarizes its functions.

Today this episode has fallen in abeyance in Doko as elsewhere. The reasons are not the same in all places. In Kutigi, a relatively recent and pseudo-Moslem ceremonial has absorbed the initiation aspect of the *gunnu*, so that the more elaborate version of the ritual came to lose its particular appeal.[1] In Mokwa, the vigil in the bush fell in disfavour with the young men, who refused to suffer any longer the threats and punishments that go with that episode; the remonstrations of parents and elders were met by the argument that even young men were nowadays earning money and paying taxes, and had hence become the equals of their seniors. In Beni country, the attractions of Bida town were seducing more and more adolescents away from the 'crude' village celebrations, so that eventually the greatly reduced attendance made the whole initiation rite seem futile. About that time, too, the Government suppressed the *ndakó gboyá* secret society, the drama in the bush thus losing its main actors. These varied causes reflect the multifarious changes assailing traditional Nupe life, in the political and economic sphere, in family relations, and in recreation as well as in religious belief. That the changes were so effective in truncating the *gunnu* (while falling more lightly or tardily upon other ceremonials) is not due only to the force behind the new influences; rather is it in large measure due to a factor touched upon before,

[1] See my article *The Gani ritual of Nupe*, Africa, 1949, vol. XIX, p. 183.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

X796
881
177

the greater vulnerability of the *gunnu* ceremonial. For the very ambitiouness of its scope exposes it, on too many sides at once, to the impact of change.

3. THE RIVER

(i) *Ritual Calendar: Priestship*

X796

In Jebba Island I recorded the fullest repertoire of rituals anywhere in Nupe country, including three movable and five 'fixed' rituals, one of the latter being also performed 'without a month', whenever the need arises. Not all, however, are still in use, so that the ritual calendar of the island now approximates more closely to that of other communities. Though the people quote specific rational reasons for the discontinuation of the respective rituals, I suspect that the 'repertoire' itself proved too large and simply became unworkable under modern conditions. Jebba Island owes its rich list of ceremonials essentially to two facts; first, to its double livelihood, derived from the land as well as from the river, and reflected in the religious institutions; and secondly, to the possession of the sacred emblems of Tsoede, which are scattered mainly along the old highway of the Kingdom—the river valley.

Today, the Jebba people perform two movable and two fixed rituals, one which serves both purposes and one which, formerly fixed, has now become 'movable'. The movable rituals proper are the *ketsá*, previously mentioned, and the *tídzana*, a sacrifice to the sacred 'Chain of Tsoede'. The fixed ceremonials comprise the rituals *mamma* and *dzakó*, both performed in the 9th month (November–December). The *gunnu*, traditionally performed in the same month, is nowadays celebrated as a movable rite, though in a different sense it still retains its compulsory character. The ritual *ndáduma*, finally, is performed both as a fixed rite, again in the 9th month, and as a movable ritual. Another movable ritual, the *žikinta*, concerned mainly with success in hunting and fishing but also with childbirth and health, is now hardly practised; and a fixed ritual, *sokokó*, was discontinued some twenty years ago. To some extent the observance of the ritual *mamma* has also been affected by the changed conditions; for most of the grass masks worn in the ceremonial were destroyed in a fire some years ago and have not been replaced; the people now husband their two remaining masks and perform the ritual only in years when there is a special reason. Even so, the ceremonial cannot be moved to another date, and has for this reason been included among the 'fixed' rituals.

The different rituals are again in the charge of different officiants.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954

FF52 Nupe FF52

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risk of divorce or even of their husbands' serious anger. The ritual alone seriously and publicly brands immorality or subjects barren women to a 'cure' which is indistinguishable from punishment. 182 183 842

Thirdly, the hectic mood of the *gunnu* dance is a model 'in reverse'. For this kind of abandoned behaviour is never permitted or thought of in ordinary life, and any open reference to sex is severely shunned by the rather prudish Nupe. Sex and privacy go together; and no ordinary dance permits a mingling of the sexes. Indeed, in all ordinary dances and in most ceremonial ones the whole mood is one of calm and restraint. Perhaps, then, we may call the *gunnu* (and one or two similar ceremonials) a safety-valve, a licensed compensation for otherwise rigid self-control; certainly, it puts a premium on a mode of behaviour otherwise not only improper but unthinkable. 796x 182 183 834 786

The final instance, again taken from the *gunnu*, is of a slightly different order. I am referring to the masquerading of the boys as girls. 'Masquerading' is possibly too strong a word, for all that happens is that the boys wear a piece of woman's cloth.[1] But this aspect of the *gunnu* dress is always specifically mentioned, and in the general dance the boys are encouraged to imitate and caricature female steps and mannerisms. Now in 'real' life boys or men are never expected to behave like the opposite sex. From the time when children put on any dress at all (when they are about six or seven), they are dressed differently. As soon as the boys form themselves into the earliest age grade (at the age of eight or nine), the occupations, interests, and codes of conduct of the sexes differ sharply, and this is true also of songs, dances, and pastimes of all kinds. Male homosexuality, which would blur this dividing line, is severely condemned and, in fact, denied to occur. The exceptional behaviour at the *gunnu* thus appears to have a symbolic significance (though it is not stated more explicitly), the temporary change of roles pointing to a more permanent one. The boys who are admitted to the *gunnu* are on the threshold of manhood, the very admission to the ritual being a first token of the new status. Before that they were something else—children, still looked after by their mothers as much as by their fathers, and being with women more often than with men. Later, this ambiguous position will come to an end, which change roughly coincides with admission to the *gunnu*. The symbolic identification with the female sex on that occasion thus emphasizes the transition through concentrating it into something like 'a last time' when boys can be confused with girls. It is not literally a 'last time'; for even before this event boys did not walk about dressed like girls or behaved 796x 182 183 881 ● [839] [838]

[1] In the *gani* ceremonial, to be described later, this 'masquerading' is much more elaborate and definite (see below, p. 218).

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

like them; and after the first admission to the *gunnu* there will be repetitions of the same ceremonial and masquerade. The *gunnu* thus exaggerates the change of roles and presents it in a manner not exactly true to life; but just because it does so it becomes a means of dramatizing a crucial crisis of life which, in reality, is neither as conspicuous nor as dramatic. So that the *gunnu*, through this part of its procedure, assumes the relevance of a *rite de passage*.

To summarize. By its professed content, the ritual applies and partly affirms the system of religious ideas; and by its form, it becomes part of the machinery which maintains the efficient working of a society of a given structure. By its form, too, the ritual 'accumulates' further aims and ideas, bearing on codes of conduct, on social roles, and hence on the values of 'good' and 'bad'. Surveying all the various Nupe rituals we find that the *gunnu*, as it is considered the paramount ritual, so it is also the richest in 'cumulative' content. There is practically no manner of acting which is not referred to and evaluated in its procedure; furthermore, the *gunnu* alone goes beyond implicit references and contains also express pronouncements upon these 'additional' aims.

As I previously tried to show, it is not paradoxical that a cult of such far-reaching importance should be the first to disappear or to be truncated under the pressure of change; rather, its very ambitiousness exposes it 'on too many sides' to disruptive influences. Let me rephrase this assertion in terms of the 'content' and 'form' of rituals. The disappearance or radical alteration of the ritual clearly implies some weakening of its appeal. The professed content of the ritual would lose its appeal only if the whole conceptual framework of the religion were disrupted, as it would be by the impact of another religion, in this case Islam. Yet this was certainly not true (or not yet true) of the many Nupe communities where the *gunnu* alone of all the various rituals had disappeared or broken down. The form of the ritual, however, since it absorbs so many of the general norms of social life, would be weakened by any change affecting the latter, by any remodelling of the relationship between the generations, by any new attractions seducing the younger people, and by all changes in moral or educational standards. It is precisely dislocations of this kind which have spread most widely through Nupe country; and it is thus the *gunnu* carrying within its 'form' a mirror of the traditional way of life, lost its appeal and indeed its very relevance as its picture ceased to be true.